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Kung

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[Title Page]

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/KUNG BUSHMAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS[1]

LORNA MARSHALL

MY purpose in this paper is to describe some of the religious beliefs held currently by the /Kung Bushmen of the interior bands of the Nyae Nyae region of South West Africa. I shall limit the paper to a description of their concepts of the gods, the problem of evil, supplication, the spirits of the dead, and the ceremonial curing dance, but leave for another paper a more detailed account of medicine men, how they become medicine men, and more about their practices and beliefs. We gathered the information which I present principally on our expeditions of 1952–3 and 1955.

Schapera traces considerable borrowing in the past by the Bushmen from Hottentots and Bergdama.[2] I did not have opportunity to trace, to any significant extent, possible present-day borrowing or exchange of ideas, and can only report that contact, and therefore opportunity for exchange, takes place between the interior bands of /Kung in the Nyae Nyae region and the Tswana and Herero on the border of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The /Kung have contact also, but much less frequently, with Makaukau (Auen) Bushmen to the south and through them to some extent with Naron in the Ghanzi region of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The /Kung of Nyae Nyae occasionally see /Kung to the north of their region, who in turn see the Okavango and Ovambo tribes. Although the Nyae Nyae /Kung had not enough contact with white people before we came to absorb any Christian ideas directly from them, and no Christian missionary has been in the interior of the region, an influence of Christianity cannot be precluded because the Tswana do have contact with Christianity. Our own highly valued interpreter, Kernel Ledimo, who grew up near the border and spoke Bushman from his childhood, had been educated in an Anglican mission school. Although there has been contact with people who have Christian ideas, I do not recognize with certainty any Christian elements among /Kung beliefs.

One is left to wonder if the change in the concept of the nature of the gods, particularly in that of the great god, which appears when one compares the old tales with current concepts, was brought about entirely by the philosophical and logical powers of the /Kung themselves and by their adjustment to emotional needs, or whether influences from without played some part. I hope that the research of others may throw light on this point.

I should like to mention a few of the well-known Bushman beliefs, recorded in the past, which the present Nyae Nyae /Kung do *not* have and then proceed to a more systematic description of beliefs which they hold at present.

The Nyae Nyae /Kung have various beliefs and lore about the sun and moon, Canopus, the Pleiades, and other stars, and they have the well-known myth of the moon and the hare; but they do not attribute active divinity to the heavenly bodies, which are 'just stars', they say in effect, and we did not find that they either fear

[1] We are grateful for a grant towards the publication of this long article.

[2] I. Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa*, London: Routledge, 1930. Reference is particularly to chapter vii.

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821 them or seek to gain beneficent influence from them. As far as we know they do not pray to them for food as the Cape Bushmen are said once to have done, or for rain as the Naron and Auen and /O /Kung do.[1]

The /Kung beliefs about rain, which I do not describe in detail in this paper, include the idea that rain is life-giving and makes the food plants and other vegetation grow, whereas the sun is death-giving. The /Kung do not now formally personify or deify rain or worship it, but may retain a vestige of an ancient personification of rain in praying to it, in a manner of speaking, as they also do to lightning. 'Fall silently, rain. Do not make such a noise. Do not be dangerous', they say. Or, to lightning, 'Do not come against me. Go to the other side.'

825 The /Kung do not attribute divinity to the mantis but, in calling it 'the servant of */Gauwa*', perhaps they preserve a vestige or an echo of the Cape Bushman belief in */Kaggen*. If they injure a mantis which is walking on them or throw one into the fire, [753] '*/Gauwa* would see this and say that his servant was being ill treated and would punish the person. He would make the person sick'. Mantises are *chi dole* (*chi*, thing; *dole*, bad) not because they harm you—they only prick and tickle you—but because they belong to */Gauwa* and people are afraid of the 'owner'. The old people told them these things. We saw the /Kung hold mantises, however, without exhibiting fear or the uncanny fascinated feeling I had when I watched them (especially the huge female who lived with me, with her consort seemingly permanently attached to her, and fascinated me by never seeming to take her eyes off me as she made her slow and stately progress around the tent at night).

The /Kung react in quite a different way to millepedes. They say there are two kinds. The large one they call *ko ko chi nabe*; the small one they call *choba* or *zoba*. One day a boy picked up a millepede and threw it toward a group of women. They jumped up and fled, shrieking. Talking about it afterwards, they explained that 'even men are afraid of millepedes'. (We observed several incidents of people jumping [753] and running from them.) They are very dangerous, the /Kung say. If one gets on you, the shock of fright you feel could kill you. 'Millepedes work with *//Gauwa*. He sends them to eat your nose when you are asleep.' If you put a *choba* in the fire when the *n/i* berries (*Grewia flava* D.C.) are still green, the berries will not ripen [278] properly and will not be sweet. If the /Kung find the ash of a millepede which has been burned in a veld fire and has kept its shape, they take the ash for a medicine. (Cf. Schapera's account that among the Naron and Auen 'the millipede, said to belong to *Hishe*, is only touched by them [magicians]; they dry it and use it powdered as medicine.'[2])

774 The /Kung do not believe that animals have spirits or souls or that earthly objects
825 (such as trees or water, for example) are entered by spirits or are themselves animated by having spirits of their own.

787 Divination is a secular practice among the /Kung. The oracle disks may be thrown and read by any man. They are five leather disks about two-and-a-half to three inches in diameter. The man who throws them gathers them into his cupped hands, flings them with a spreading motion on to a kaross on the ground, and reads what they reveal or predict. Different personifications are attributed to the disks, according to what the people want to learn from them. If advice about a hunt is wanted, the

[1] Schapera, op. cit., pp. 176–7. [2] Ibid., p. 197.

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disks may represent two eland bulls, two eland cows, and a hyena, the fifth disk being the factor of ill fortune, and in this role they tell the hunters in what direction they should go and what success or difficulty to expect. The names of people who are absent may be attributed to the disks, which then give news of the people. As everyone knows where everyone is likely to be and what is likely to befall, the disks are more often right than wrong. They afforded us the amusement of a remarkable coincidence, which people so delight in, when they foretold quite precisely the return of one of our party who had been away and whom we had not expected nearly so soon.

It was entertaining to watch a session with the disks. A group of men would gather around the thrower. The thrower always had his say, but he was not allowed to pontificate. Everyone read the disks with him and gave his own interpretation. Sometimes the men would disagree and shout at each other in effect, ' Idiot, don't you see it means this? ' At other times they were grave and intent, searching for the meaning. Whether they came to a consensus or went off, each holding to his own opinion, was never clear.

The Names of the Gods

The Names of the Great God

In present times the /Kung of the Nyae Nyae region believe that there are two gods, one the great and one the lesser, that they have wives and children, and that they are attended by the spirits of the dead.

These beings all live in the sky. The great god lives in the east at the place where the sun rises, the lesser god in the west where the sun sets.

The great god created himself. Then he created the lesser god. He created two wives, one for himself and one for the lesser god. The elder wife lives usually with the great god in the east, the younger one with the lesser god in the west, but, at any time the great god wishes, he may take both wives to live with him in the east. The wives bore six children to the gods, three boys and three girls. The great god created the earth and men and women and all things.

The great god named himself and then gave names to the lesser god and to their wives and children. He gave himself his names to praise himself. He said, ' I am *Hishe*. I am unknown, a stranger. No one can command me.' He praised himself also with the name */Gara* when he did something against the people, and the people said, ' He causes death among the people and causes the rain to thunder.' ' I am *≠Gaishi ≠gai* ', said the great god. ' I am *chi dole*. I am a bad thing. I take my own way. No one can advise me.' His being the cause of sickness and death among the people was the reason for his giving himself many names, we were told. This was apparently a satisfying reason to the /Kung, who offered no other explanation.

The great god has seven divine names and one earthly name, the last being *≠Gaolna*, Old ≠Gao. His earthly name, though not as common as some, is a man's name which we came upon fairly often. I call his seven other names ' divine ' because they belong only to the gods. They are:

Hishe	*/Gara*	*/Gauwa*
Huwe	*Gani ga*	
Kxo	*≠Gaishi ≠gai*	

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776 171 The name *Hishe*, Schapera tells us, is used by the Naron and Auen.[1] He thinks it may be a corruption of *Heitsi Eibib*, a mythical hero of the Hottentots.[2] As this name is not reported for other /Kung groups by Miss Bleek, Vedder, or Lebzelter, it is possible that it has been borrowed by the Nyae Nyae /Kung from the Auen. The Auen (also called Makaukau) live immediately south of the Nyae Nyae region.[3]

The name *Hnwe* is reported for Miss Lloyd's /Kung informants from Lake Ngami by Miss Bleek, for the /Kung at Tsumeb by Vedder, and for the eastern Kalahari group by Dornan, but not for the Auen or Naron, who said to Miss Bleek, as Schapera tells us,[4] that 'he [*Hnwe*] was the "captain" of the men in the north, the Makoba and others. They also said he was the brother of *Hishe*, while one man called him the "captain" of the white people'.

The name *Kxo* is something of a puzzle. I spelt it this way because I thought I heard both the *k* and the velar fricative sound *x*, as distinct from the name *Ko*.[5] I believe now that what I heard as *Kxo* is the name which Schapera tells us is spelt both *Xu* and *‖Khu* by Lebzelter.[6] Lebzelter's account of *Xu* given him by the group he calls the eastern /Kung accords so closely with the Nyae Nyae /Kung's account of *Hishe—Hnwe—Kxo* that I feel certain that *Xu* and *Kxo* are conceptually the same being.

The Nyae Nyae /Kung did not have the name (or title) */khuba*, the Hottentot word for 'master', which Schapera tells us the Auen and Naron were beginning to borrow from the Nama when Miss Bleek worked with the Auen at Sandfontein.[7] Nor did they have *Thora* which Dornan heard among Bushmen of the eastern Kalahari.[8] And none of the informants we worked with knew the name *Erob* recorded by Lebzelter among the /Kung in the Oschimpoloveld. Schapera tells us that this name came from the Hebrew *Elohim*, a name used by missionaries among the Nama for 'God'.[9]

776 I shall have more to say about *‖Gauwa* and *≠Gaoma* presently. The remaining three names, */Gara*, *Gani ga*, and *≠Gaishi ≠gai*, do not appear in the accounts of Bushman religion which Schapera analysed. I struggled to ascertain that they were names, not terms, titles, or descriptive phrases. So far, my evidence leads me to consider them names, but I could not trace their origin. My informants had no idea

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 182.

[2] Ibid., pp. 191, 374.

[3] For the location and extent of the Nyae Nyae region see Lorna Marshall, '/Kung Bushman Bands', *Africa*, vol. xxx, no. 4, Oct. 1960, pp. 325–7.

[4] Schapera, op. cit., p. 183.

[5] Some /Kung informants, /Ti/kay among them, claimed they did not know the name *Ko*. Others told us that *Ko* is a god of other people, a different god, not *≠Gaoma* or *‖Gauwa*. They said, for example, that the white man's god is *Ko*. One informant said, in effect, that, even though *Ko* was a god of other people, he could kill anybody—white men, black men, and Bushmen. One is interested to note that *Ko* was the name of the female mantis god of the Bushmen of Basutoland, reported by Arbousset, as Schapera tells us (ibid., p. 181).

[6] 'Lebzelter, in his account of Kung religion, says that all the groups investigated by him have the belief in a "supreme good being" ("ein höchstes gutes Wesen"). Among the Eastern Kung this being is termed *Xu* (elsewhere he spells the name *‖Khu*) or *Xuwa*, "the Lord" or "the great captain", whom he identifies with Vedder's *Hnwe* or *Ha'o*.' (Ibid., p. 183.)

Bushman languages present so many difficulties to those who are not experts in them—difficulties in recognizing the clicks and in sorting out variations in pronunciation between individuals even of the same group, as well as variations that are probably imposed by the position of the words in the sentence and by other grammatical configurations, &c.—that such discrepancies as *Kxo*, *Xu*, and *‖Khu* are relatively slight. Fully aware of my own inadequacy in the language, I usually assume when I differ from another observer that the other is right and I am wrong. However, I cannot simply adopt another's rendering of the word without knowing if the discrepancy is due to dialectal differences or to my ignorance or what, and so must stick to my own approximations.

[7] Schapera, op. cit., pp. 182–3.

[8] Ibid., p. 183.

[9] Ibid., p. 190.

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where the names came from (' The old people told us that he gave himself these names ', they said) and I do not have sufficient relevant comparative material to throw possible light on the question. Informants said that ≠*Gao/na* was the oldest of the names of God and that */Gara* was the next oldest.

The Names of the Lesser God

The great god named the lesser god by giving him all of his own ' divine ' names but not his human name, ≠*Gao/na*.

Having been named for the great god, the lesser god is the great god's namesake, his */guma* (*/gu* is name, *ma* is small or younger), and the great god is the */gu/na* (*/na* means old, older, or big).

The concept of the namesake, and of the relationship between the */gu/na* and the */guma*, is an important one in the /Kung kinship system.[1] */Gu/na* and */guma* are always of the same sex, /Kung names being sex-linked. One shares in some mystical way the entity of the person for whom one is named. Incest taboos require that one must not marry the parent or offspring of one's */gu/na* or */guma*. Behaviour between a */gu/na* and a */guma* is as open and free from formal restrictions as any in /Kung society. They have the joking relationship. Only the usual respect of the young for the old is expected.

The opposite conditions exist between parent and child. A man must not name a son for himself or a daughter for her mother. Parent and offspring do not have the joking relationship.

It was interesting to me to find the great and lesser god in the */gu/na–/guma* relationship rather than the father–son relationship, as it offers some evidence that the concept of the two gods is not influenced by the Christian concept of God, the father, and Jesus, the son. Also one comes to see that the father-son relationship would not serve the Bushmen as well as the */gu/na–/guma* relationship in explaining the problem of evil, for a son would not present as sharp a duality, but, according to human standards, would express respect, obedience, deference, propriety, and assistance, which is not *in total* the function of the lesser god.

The Names of the Wives of the Gods

The Nyae Nyae /Kung believe that ≠*Gao/na* gave all his own ' divine ' names to both of the wives; *di*, the suffix which means ' female ' is added: *Hishedi*, *Hmvedi*, *Kxodi*, */Garadi*, *Gani gadi*, ≠*Gaishi* ≠*gaidi*, *//Ganvadi*.

≠*Gao/na*, the great god's human name, is not applied to the wives, men's names never being given to women. One would say instead ≠*Gao/na a tsau*, ' ≠*Gao/na* his wife '.

Each wife has a human name as well. The elder one, who usually lives alone with ≠*Gao/na*, is named *Khwova/na*, Old Khwova. The younger one is *//Gow*. (*//Gow* rhymes with *how*. The *ao* sound in the men's names Gao, ≠Gao, and /Gao I use arbitrarily and mean by it a slightly shorter, more closed sound, like the *ou* in *ouch*.) We knew only two women named //Gow but knew many Khwovas.

The wives of the gods may be referred to or addressed by a respect term, used

[1] Cf. Lorna Marshall, ' The Kin Terminology System of the /Kung Bushmen', *Africa*, vol. xxvii, no. 1, Jan. 1957, pp. 1–25.

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776 [576] only for females, *Aolidi*, a term which one may also apply to women when one wants to be especially polite and to honour them. It is used for women ' who possess lots of things ', the /Kung explained. *Gaoxadi*, the female form of one of the respect terms for the gods, may also be applied.

[222] *Khwova/na* is also called ' the mother of the bees '. When men go to look for honey they pray to her.

' The wives of the gods have the same work as their husbands. Their work is also strong ', we were told.

The Names of the Children of the Gods

The names of the six children of the gods are as follows: for the boys—*/Kwa ma, Nami, /Kmg go*; for the girls—*/Kharn, /Nai, /Kow. Nami, /Kharn*, and */Nai* are familiar names to me, the others are not. These names are from Robert Dyson's notes (for which I want to express my gratitude), and it is possible that the name he writes */Kow* is the same as the one I write *//Gow*. As I have said, such questions and discrepancies about words are very common.

In the myths, but not in the /Kung's current account of their beliefs, *≠Gao/na* has two other sons who are involved in many strange events with their father. Their [821] names are *Khan//a* and *Kxoma*. They were turned into the two stars in the vertical axis of the Southern Cross which now bear their names. Alpha Crux is *Khan//a*; Gamma Crux is *Kxoma*.

Miss Bleek was told that *Hishe* was sometimes ' followed by children like baboons '.[1] The image this gives of the divine children leaping and playing and following like infant baboons is amusing. The image which the Nyae Nyae /Kung have, however, is very different. ' The girls are fresh and beautiful ', they say, ' not ugly like Bushmen.' Their skin is the colour of Bushman skin but at its lightest shade (*gan*).

[775] The children are called little *//ganwasi* (*si* is the plural suffix). The spirits of the dead are also called *//ganwasi*. It is the children's special duty to carry the spirits of mortals, when they die, from the dead bodies to their ' father in the sky '. We were told that the little *//ganwasi* are helpful to humans. ' They watch over them and help to prevent *≠Gao/na* from getting angry.'

Terms of Respect and Disrespect

776 576 In addition to the names, the Nyae Nyae /Kung apply three terms of respectful address to the gods: *gaoxa, n/iha*, and */nan*. As I mentioned in my paper on the structure of bands,[2] the terms *gaoxa* and *n/iha* may be applied also to human chiefs, or to persons who are over others, like a district commissioner, and they are sometimes applied to a Bushman headman, although, to be strictly proper in /Kung, a headman is called *kxau*, ' owner '. *Gaoxa* is the more exalted term. Some informants felt that to call a man *gaoxa* was to compare him to the deity, which might anger the gods. Others felt that it ' sounded like a curse ' to call a man *gaoxa*. The term pleases *≠Gao/na*, however. When he hears it applied to himself he knows that the people respect and fear him and ' he has a good feeling about them '.

/Nau among the Nyae Nyae /Kung is a term of respect for any old man and it is

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 191.

[2] Cf. Lorna Marshall, ' /Kung Bushman Bands,' *Africa*, vol. xxx, no. 4, Oct. 1960, pp. 325–55.

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also commonly used for any man (not a boy) older than the speaker when the speaker must avoid saying the name. The people address the gods as */nan* and *gaoxa* more commonly than as *n/iha*. We were told that they call the great god */nan* ' when he is good '. [576]

It is interesting to know that the power of the great god, his omnipotence which he was so mysteriously able to create for himself, is called *gaoxa* and that the special potent ' spiritual ' medicine which the great god puts into the medicine men, the curing power, is also called *gaoxa*. [756]

The /Kung often call the great god ' father ' especially in supplication, and plead that he succour his ' children ' and give them rain or good fortune in the hunt or whatever they may be asking for. [782]

Nonabe is a term of great disrespect, a ' scolding ' term. When used for a human being it is a curse and a terrific insult. A man who felt himself greatly wronged by another and in violent anger would say of the man who wronged him, ' That *Nonabe*! ' But he would not say this to the man's face ' for if he did there might be a fight (so great is the insult). When he saw the man in person he would come in peace to him, not showing his anger '. *Nonabe* is used in blasphemy by the medicine men in trance, along with other insults when they are combating the gods and the *//gaowasi* in the medicine dances, demanding that they take away the evil they have brought. [578] [756]

The Fear of the Names

The Nyae Nyae /Kung ' fear ' (*koa*) to utter the names of the gods. The word 'means both' to be afraid of, as one is afraid of a mamba, and 'to respect and avoid', as one respects one's mother-in-law and avoids speaking to her and saying her name. 776 784

Children must strictly avoid saying any of the names of the gods. Old men and women need not observe an absolutely restrictive taboo in uttering the names, and may and do say them, but there seems to be an element of taboo (it is a ' death-thing ', they say) and fear of drawing attention to themselves. We were aware of their unwillingness to speak of religious matters early in our work and therefore waited until our relations were well established before questioning them. Our information was gathered for the most part in 1953 and 1955 at many different sessions with fifteen men and eight women informants who had proved to be reliable. Others joined the talks casually and when they wished to do so. Our informants declared themselves willing to teach me because I wished to know. Throughout the discussions people varied in the degree of caution and discretion with which they spoke the names. Sometimes we talked literally in whispers and usually at least in low voices, saying ' the one in the east ', ' the one in the west '. On one occasion /Ti/kay told me that my questions made him sick. He meant to claim, I ascertained, that he had an actual physical sensation such as a nervous twinge or slight nausea. The woman who first told me the name of the wife of the great god put her lips to my ear and whispered, barely audibly, ' *Huwadi* '. Next day, unfortunately, she had a high fever. She recovered, but the episode put an end to my trying to learn from her about the wives of the gods. /U, when someone was ill at Cho/ana, and she was filled with anxiety and longing to be home at Gautscha, made me promise not to say the names or ask any more questions, at least until we were all safely back. [124] [753]

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776 782 In spite of their reluctance to say the gods' names in serious discussion, the /Kung say them in blasphemy. (The word for cursing or blasphemy is *za*. Cursing is also called 'mouth-medicine'.) The medicine men curse the gods when they are combating their evil intents in the curing ceremony. A light-hearted blasphemy also occurs among the /Kung, as among ourselves, and the names slip from men's mouths in an insouciant way, as though they did not really mean them, as we say 'God Almighty!' or 'Jesus Christ!' in our inconsequential swearing.

I wondered if we should find that certain names were more closely associated with certain phenomena, like lightning or rain, or with special functions, such as presiding over childbirth, but all my inquiries on this theme led me to the conclusion that the names do not have such associations. There appears to be, however, a vague tendency, though not a strict rule, to associate some names more with benefaction, others more with ill treatment of the people. *Gani ga*, which is a very respectful name, seemed to come to mind when they wanted to show that they were well disposed towards the god and wanted to thank him or ask him sweetly to help them. */Gara* and *≠Gaishi ≠gai* we heard spoken in anger. They are 'scolding' names. One man used *Huwe* when he spoke of the greatness and power of the god, saying '*Huwe* was the tallest of the Bushmen, a great man with many names', and *Hishe* was the name used when the creator said, 'I am *Hishe*. I am unknown.' *Kxo* was not often uttered. The name */Gauwa* will be discussed later.

Two Images of *≠Gao/na*

≠Gao/na, *the Protagonist of the Old Tales*

776 539 *≠Gao/na*, we were told, was the oldest name of the great god. Through that name the /Kung identify the great god with an old *≠Gao/na*, the protagonist of many ancient tales. Some sense of logical necessity, I believe, compelled the /Kung to merge the two concepts so that they say, when they are asked, that the *≠Gao/na* of the tales and the great god are the same being, but this is a forced and superficial verbal resolution, for the two beings could hardly be more different. The people, I believe, really imagine them as different, and behave in quite a different manner as they speak of them. They tell the tales of the old *≠Gao/na*'s doings without restraint, [522] say his name aloud, howl and roll on the ground with laughter at his humiliations, whereas, when they speak of the great one in the east, they whisper and avoid his name. Yet they think that somehow in the rightness of things these two beings must be one, so one they are said to be.

The old *≠Gao/na* was a kind of culture hero. He had supernatural powers. He could change himself into other forms and could change people into animals, bring people back to life, &c. He was a great magician, with powers over magic substances and objects. But, although he gave fire to mankind, he could not be called a great [572] benefactor of mankind. He wanted fire for himself because he liked cooked food and gave the fire to man rather as an afterthought. He was not very much concerned with man or with man's morals. He was not the death-giver, involved in the mysterious inevitable necessity of death, or a wrathful punisher, like Jehovah. Such vengeance as he took was not a mighty vengeance but only a getting back at those who tricked [266] him. And usually his reason for killing someone was his own hunger. In those older days, according to the tales, people were always eating one another or parts of one

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1. Whirlwinds in the huge veld fires become pillars of cloud by day

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2. The oracle disks

[p.228 (A)]

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3. The boys may be climbing the baobab tree to look for honey or to look around the country for signs of game

[p.228 (B)]

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4. The jani bird toy

5.24

5. Boys catch the jani bird with sticks before it touches the ground and toss it high into the air again

[p. 228 (c)]

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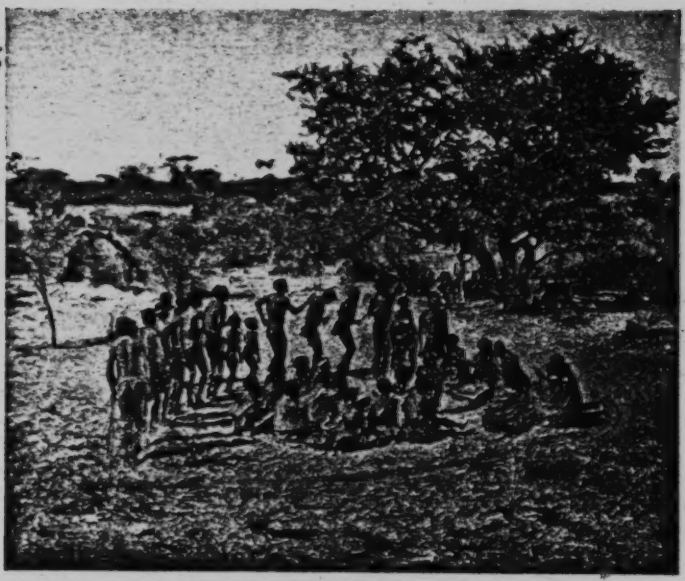

6. The curing dance; the men cut through the circle of singing, clapping women. The time for dancing is the night, but occasionally the /Kung dance in the daytime when there is a reason, such as obliging us when we asked for a daytime dance to photograph or as a preliminary to a *choma* ceremony

7. The dance rattles, strings of cocoons, add a swish, swish to the thud of the small, strong, stamping steps

[p. 228 (D)]

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[p. 228 (E)]

8. Occasionally a woman dances with the men for a brief time. All the men who are dancing except two (fourth and sixth from right) are practising medicine men. The one at the farthest left and the one bending forward are beginning to go into trance. Others hold them. In this stage they cure the people, leaning over one and then another, laying on their hands, and making their ' medicine ' gestures and sounds

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9. The next stage of trance

10. Two medicine men in deep trance; the people rest

[p. 228(F)]

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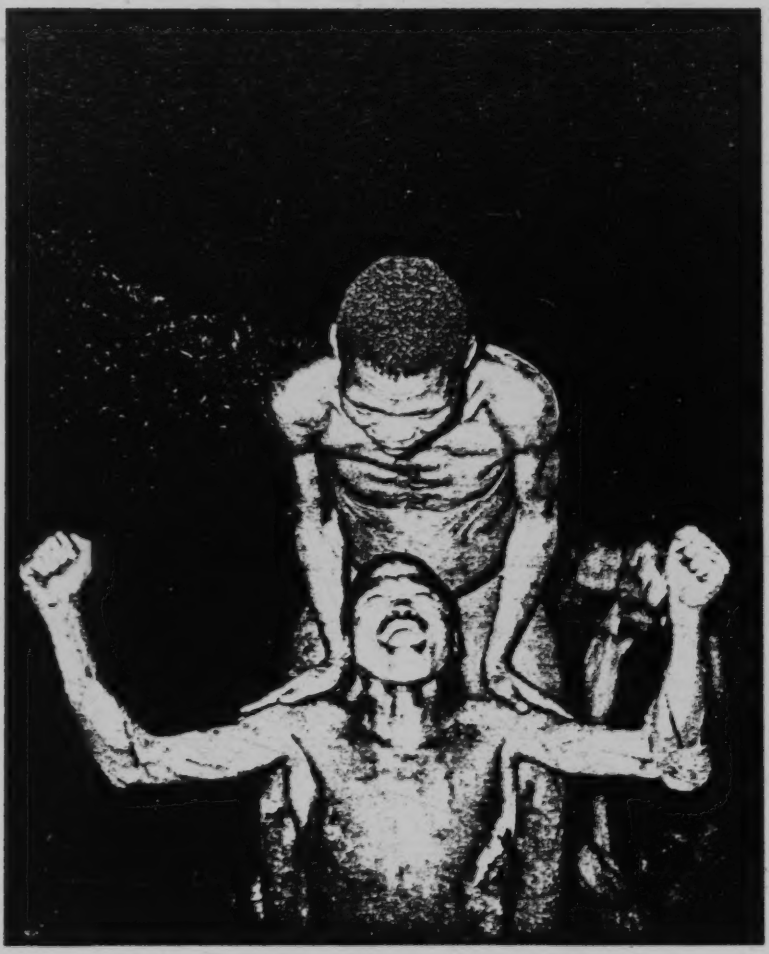

11. The scream

[p. 228 (G)]

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12. Five medicine men at sunrise after they had danced and cured all night long. The women must still clap and sing the protective medicine music. The men in semi-trance care for those in deep trance, or 'half-death', as they call it

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13. The tradition is continued. Playing 'dance', a little girl claps and sings while two boys dance around her

[p. 228 (H)]

14. The boys imitate a trance

15. Gao, the medicine man who sees /Gauwa as a grey mist

[p. 228 (I)]

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another or parts of themselves. In appearance and other characteristics the old ≠*Gao/na* was more man-like than supernatural. He lived on the earth among men. Like men he was subject to passions, hungers, sins, stupidities, failures, frustrations, and humiliations, but men imagine his to be on a larger scale and more grotesque than their own. Like Bushmen of today, his great concerns were hunger and sex. To the /Kung the two worst sins, the unthinkable, unspeakable sins, are cannibalism and incest. ≠*Gao/na* committed both these sins quite unconcernedly. He ate his older brother-in-law and his younger brother-in-law and raped his son's wife.

≠Gao/na, *his* Tun/ga (*the Fat Paauw*), *and the Pit*[1]

≠*Gao/na*'s wives were sisters. They had a brother who was a paauw. One day ≠*Gao/na* met the paauw, his *tun/ga*. [*Tun/ga* is the kin term for wife's brother older than the speaker.] His *tun/ga* was very fat. A fat paauw has bags of fat under his wings. ≠*Gao/na* and his *tun/ga* spoke together and parted. ≠*Gao/na* was surprised to see so much fat. He said, 'Oh, how fat my *tun/ga* is.' A few miles on they met again. ≠*Gao/na* said, 'Look, do you see that veld fire over there?' He pointed with his arm away up. The paauw said, 'Do you mean *that* fire?' He pointed, but only with a restricted gesture, keeping his wing to his side. 'No, ≠*Gao/na* said, 'THAT fire,' and he pointed with his arm far up, his whole armpit showing. 'I see it,' said the paauw, and he stretched his wing far up to point. ≠*Gao/na* was standing behind him. He seized the fat below the paauw's wing and cut it off and ran home. The paauw cursed ≠*Gao/na*. 'Break your bones and die,' he said. 'Die of a broken back or die of a broken neck,' he said.

≠*Gao/na* took the fat home and rubbed his wooden basins with it. His wives came home and found the wooden basins covered with fat and they asked him what he had eaten that was so fat. ≠*Gao/na* said that he got the fat from a puff adder. He said he beat it with a stick until the fat from the front went down the back to the middle, and beat the tail until the fat from the back went up the back to the middle. ≠*Gao/na* now planned how he would get his *tun/ga*. He slept that night. The next morning he set snares under the tree where the paauw went to eat gum. ≠*Gao/na* then met the paauw again. The paauw was wary and wouldn't come near. ≠*Gao/na* said, 'Why are you so wild with me?' [Wild is the opposite of tame, domesticated, or confident.] 'There is a tree there with gum under it but my eyes are not good enough to see it.' He said,' Let us have a contest; we shall see who can see the gum first. The one who sees it first must run and snatch it.' So they went to the tree and saw the gum. The paauw ran fast to get it, and ≠*Gao/na* ran too but he did not run so fast. The paauw snatched the gum and the snare caught him, and ≠*Gao/na* ran up and clubbed him, and carried him home. ≠*Gao/na*'s wives were out for veldkos. He put the fat from the other wing in a small pot and the body of the paauw in a big pot. When the wing fat was ready he ate it, and ate and ate, but he ate too much and he went out and had diarrhoea. The wives came home and suspected that perhaps he had killed their brother. The paauw began to expand in the pot and he swelled and swelled until *kaah!* the pot burst and pieces of meat came whizzing out so that ≠*Gao/na* had to duck away from them. When all the meat was out, the paauw came back together again and flew away. ≠*Gao/na* chased after him but the wives called to him, 'Come back, you forgot your stick.' ≠*Gao/na* came back and got his stick and ran after the paauw again. The wives called him, 'Come back, you forgot your

[1] I wish to acknowledge with gratitude and pleasure the assistance of our daughter, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, in gathering the material of the old tales, as well as other data. The first tale is hers. In paraphrasing the tales, we adhered to the events, the ideas, and the details, incorporating them as they were told us, but we have put the tales into our own words, attempting to preserve something of the quality of the telling as it came to our ears.

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539 sandals.' ≠*Gao/na* came back and got his sandals and ran after the paouw again, but the paouw was gone by this time. ≠*Gao/na* cursed at his wives, 'You stupid lazy women, why were you so lazy that you lay down and didn't stir the pot?' The wives were much annoyed that ≠*Gao/na* had wanted to eat their brother.

Next day ≠*Gao/na* went hunting. While he was away his wives, because they were very annoyed, turned themselves into */qui twa* veldkos [a veldkos which is like small cucumbers]. When ≠*Gao/na* came home he saw the pile of ripe */qui twa* and ate them all. Then he came and sat by the fire. Soon he heard something laughing. He looked around but no one was there. He heard the laughing again and looked around. 'What is that?' he said, but he could see nothing. He heard the laughing again and again. 'Where is that laughing coming from?' he said. It was his wives inside him laughing at him and at this they kicked and kicked until they burst his stomach open and came out and were women again. ≠*Gao/na* was very surprised. How did he eat his wives? he wondered. */Narn*, a dung beetle, then came to sew up ≠*Gao/na*'s stomach. It was very sore. ≠*Gao/na* squirmed and struggled when */narn* pricked him. Then came a little *xwa xwa* fly. He took over the sewing and sewed so gently that it was only like a tickling. ≠*Gao/na* was healed and soothed and he slept.

Next day ≠*Gao/na* went hunting again. He was annoyed with his wives for tricking him into eating them and for laughing in his stomach and bursting him open. Presently he came upon some fruit. He said, 'Oh, if only I had my sister or mother to gather veldkos for me!' He turned back and told his wives where the fruit was and went on the other way. The wives went to gather the fruit, but ≠*Gao/na* with his medicine had made the heavy fruit able to fly from the tree and hit the women so that they ran away crying. [The /Kung who were telling the story made the sounds which the fruits made bombarding the women, slapping themselves, crying like the wives, and rolling over with laughter.] [522]

The wives returned to their werf. They were quite sad because their husband had treated them in this way and they discussed what they would do to get even with him. Next day they went out for veldkos again. They came to a place which they decided was right for their plan. They dug a big pit. Into it they opened their bowels and the pit was full of faeces. They then went to their werf and waited for ≠*Gao/na*. When he returned they said, 'If only we had a brother, he would go and kill the little eland we saw.'

≠*Gao/na* said, 'My wives, *I* shall go for you.'

They said, 'We know you are lazy, but our brother would go.'

But ≠*Gao/na* said, 'No, my wives, I shall go for you tomorrow.' So they slept. The next day the wives led him to the place where they said they had seen the little eland, where they had made the pit. They said, 'There it is, by that tree. You must go quietly.'

≠*Gao/na* brought an arrow out to shoot the eland, but the wives said, 'You lazy man, do not shoot it; catch it.' So ≠*Gao/na* got out his spear and the wives said, 'You will let all the blood run out. We like the blood to eat. That is what we meant when we said we wished we had our brother here to kill the little eland.'

So ≠*Gao/na* put his spear away. The wives said, 'Right there is where the little eland is; you must jump on it and catch it. We shall go on either side to help you.' And, when they were near, they said, 'Jump and fall on it and catch it.'

≠*Gao/na* got all set and made himself steady. Then he jumped and fell into the pit and the wives ran in every direction, laughing and saying how lazy he was. There he was in the pit. He could not stand up. He slithered around 'like a snake', the people said with graphic gestures and shrieks of laughter. He got up and fell down again, he got up again and fell again, swearing at his wives and cursing them. 'These wives are very cruel.' [The people imitated his voice, higher than a man's voice and mumbling.] When ≠*Gao/na* finally got out of the pit he went to a water-hole and washed himself and walked home in the evening thinking of what he would do to his wives to punish them. [195]

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Eyes-on-His-Feet

≠*Gao/na*'s younger brother-in-law, his *tun/gama*, was named Eyes-on-His-Feet. He and ≠*Gao/na* went together to gather veldkos. They found *//karu*. After a time they came to a place where they wanted to stay and made a fire to roast the *//karu*. While they were sitting by the fire ≠*Gao/na* watched his *tun/gama*'s feet and saw what looked like eyes. He tossed dust on them and the eyes blinked. ≠*Gao/na* said, ' These are really his eyes. His face is just smooth. His eyes are on his feet.' ≠*Gao/na* then asked the *tun/gama* to lean over and press the *//karu* down into the ashes so that they would be all covered and would roast evenly. While the *tun/gama* was doing this, ≠*Gao/na* threw coals on his feet and burned his eyes. This weakened the *tun/gama* and ≠*Gao/na* was easily able to cover him all over with coals and roast him. While the *tun/gama* was roasting there was a sound, *tsi i its ii tsi ii* (like meat sizzling), and the *tun/gama* put a magic curse on ≠*Gao/na*'s mouth. When the *tun/gama* was well roasted, ≠*Gao/na* ate all he could of him and put what he could not eat into a bag. He then tried to eat the *//karu*. He put one up to his mouth but his mouth would not open. He took another. It fell down to the side. ≠*Gao/na* could neither speak nor eat. He put the *//karu* into the bag with the remains of the *tun/gama* and went back to his people in the werf and ordered them to make a dance to cure his mouth. He danced and danced with them and treated himself. While he was dancing, his wives took his bag and ate what was left of Eyes-on-His-Feet and all the *//karu* but one. [The story makes no point of the fact that they were eating their brother, albeit unknowingly, and one feels the omission hovering on the edge of being said.] Then they filled the bag with earth and put the *//karu* on top. Suddenly ≠*Gao/na*'s mouth was cured. He went to get his bag to finish his *tun/gama*, put in his hand, took some earth, and tossed it into his mouth. He spat and swore at his wives. ' You silly women,' he said, ' what have you done? ' And he thought what he would do to them. Next evening he called for another dance. A woman got up to dance but ≠*Gao/na* said, ' No, I want a good singer to dance with me, not you.' At last ≠Tamsa, the wife who had put the earth in the bag, got up to dance. She danced around ≠*Gao/na*, he danced around her, and when she came near he beat her fiercely on the stomach with his stick, until her stomach hung down below her groin. She fell unconscious and all the other wives took her and ran away and treated and treated her, crying, until she was all right. This is why Bushmen have stomachs that hang down.

≠Toma and /Qui thought this was an awful story. /Qui said he did not know why ≠*Gao/na* ate his *tun/gama*. He thought the reason could not have been mere hunger—after all, /Qui pointed out, he had *//karu*. There must have been some other reason. ≠Toma said, ' ≠*Gao/na* is evil. Even now he goes about killing people.'

In another version the awfulness of eating a human being is modified by having Eyes-on-His-Feet come to life again. During the dance, ≠*Gao/na*'s stomach began to ache and make sounds and to swell, as with severe constipation. Suddenly it burst open and Eyes-on-His-Feet sprang out, as the wives had done after their laughter, whole and alive. In still another version ≠*Gao/na* turns ≠Tamsa into a bird called *chue*, a white and yellow bird about as big as a dove. This is one of the birds which the /Kung eat. They grab it in tree-holes when it is nesting. All my efforts to learn more about the possible identity of Eyes-on-His-Feet availed nothing. I wondered if he were not originally some veldkos, for instance, with a formation that suggested eyes, or an animal turned into a human being, or personified, like the paouw, but our /Kung informants did not know. The old people had not told them.

When my inquiries suggested to my informants that I expected them, possibly, to

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539 [154] know something which they did not know, they became defensive. /U said that her mother was lazy and did not tell her stories. That was why she knew so little. Old Xama said that her mother died when she was young, so she had remained ignorant.

[522] The story of ≠*Gao/na*'s raping his son's pretty young wife is long and detailed and is recounted with humour and great enjoyment by the /Kung. ≠*Gao/na* tried to be away with the women alone while they were gathering veldkos. First he changed himself into a baby wildebeest, pretended that he was dead, and let the women pick him up. That plan did not work, so he made another. He disguised himself very cleverly as his own sister and went with the women to gather when they stayed overnight, and raped his son's wife, Te, in her sleep. In the morning when the women discovered who he was, he tried to persuade Te that it was not he but her husband, Kxoma, who had been there in the night, but Te knew it was not and was terribly upset. The women decided not to tell Kxoma or Khan//a, because they were afraid the sons would kill their father, so they all kept quiet when they returned and they lived in peace.

These stories have become very mixed up. In another version, the pit episode is used again. It is the sons' wives who dig the pit and entice ≠*Gao/na* to jump into it in revenge for ≠*Gao/na*'s ' spoiling ' Te. The substance in the pit is not faeces but ≠*Gao/na*'s own semen. The women shape the semen into the form of a young giraffe. When ≠*Gao/na* finally gets out of this pit he cleans himself by rubbing himself on trees.

≠Gao/na *and His Stupid Generosity*

≠*Gao/na* sometimes prevails in his endeavours, but he has lapses and often appears to be far from clever. In one story he is both stupid and generous—too generous. This is a very long story in which Kxoma and Khan//a, his sons, kill an eland. Lions come and kill the sons. With the help of *zam zam*, the little tortoise, who was a person then and another brother of his wives, ≠*Gao/na* kills the lions by magic and restores his sons to life. The story ends in their all returning to the werf with the eland meat. They walk along. They meet a man. They give him gifts of meat. This man quickly hides his meat in a tree, then, dodging along behind some bushes, he runs ahead and meets ≠*Gao/na* and his party again. The sons and *zam zam* say, ' We have already given you some meat', but ≠*Gao/na* cannot remember and gives meat again. A third and a fourth time the man runs ahead and ≠*Gao/na* gives again, [522] in this way. [Dam and /Qui were speechless with laughter acting this out.] For the fifth time the man runs ahead and ≠*Gao/na* does not remember him and gives him his last bundle of meat. ≠*Gao/na* would now have to return to his wives without any meat for them, but instead he hits his buttocks very hard. He hits them and hits them until he knocks his insides out. He cuts his insides into pieces, like meat, and takes them to his werf. Others have meat but he has none except his own insides. He cooks them for his wives. They say the meat is too tough to eat and ask, ' Why do the others have nice eland meat and you only this? ' He says it is eland meat but that it has become dry. ≠*Gao/na* and his wives go hungry.

A story about ≠*Gao/na*'s getting fire was told in several versions. In one of them the name *Huwe* was used. That was the only time I heard the protagonist of the tales called by any name but ≠*Gao/na*.

≠Gao/na *and the Fire Sticks*

There was a time when no one had fire except one man whose name was /Kai /Kini. He had fire and the name of this fire was *doro*. [The word for fire is *da*.] *Doro* was made with fire

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sticks. /Kai /Kini cooked his food with the fire. Other people ate raw food. One day ≠*Gao/na* was walking in the veld and he came upon the place where /Kai /Kini was living. He was not there but his children were. They were eating cooked *//karu*. ≠*Gao/na* asked for some and found it very good. 'Oh, you eat nice cooked food,' said ≠*Gao/na*. 'How do you cook it?' The children said, 'Our father has a nice thing and he always gives us cooked food. He does all the best for us.' ≠*Gao/na* said, 'I shall come back tomorrow and eat this kind of food again.'

Next day he went back. As he was walking along he saw /Kai /Kini and his children digging for food in the ground and he hid himself and watched. When they had gathered enough, they went back to their werf and /Kai /Kini went and got his fire sticks from the place where he had hidden them. He twirled and twirled and twirled the male stick against the female stick, saying, 'Fire will come; fire will come.' When the fire was made and the food was cooking, /Kai /Kini hid his fire sticks again. ≠*Gao/na* was watching all the time. When the food was dished up, he came out from his hiding-place and sat down by the fire and they all ate together.

After a while ≠*Gao/na* said, 'Now we must make a game to play', and he made a *jani* toy, mounting it with a guinea-fowl feather, weighting it with a *tsi* nut. He tossed it into the air with his stick and, when it floated down, ran and caught it and tossed it up again and again without its ever falling to the ground. /Kai /Kini wanted to play. ≠*Gao/na* gave him the *jani*, but /Kai /Kini could not toss it high and did not get away from his house in following it. ≠*Gao/na* said the guinea-fowl feather was no good, they must put a big paouw feather on it. This they did and the *jani* flew high. ≠*Gao/na* then opened the wind and the wind blew from the eastern side and blew the *jani* toward the west. /Kai /Kini followed and followed it, fascinated, tossing it higher each time he caught it. ≠*Gao/na* followed /Kai /Kini and, when they came to the place where the fire sticks were hidden, he seized them and ran with them into the veld. As he ran he broke them into little pieces and then threw them the whole world over. 'All the world is going to get fire now', he said. 'Fire, fire, go over the world.' Since then there has been fire in every piece of wood and all men can get it out and cook their food. /Kai /Kini stopped playing and looked at ≠*Gao/na*. ≠*Gao/na* told him, 'It is not right that you alone should have fire. From now on you will not be a person', and he changed /Kai /Kini into a bird named ≠*ore*.

These events were told by the old old people. They happened long ago.

The Present Image: /Gao/na, *the Creator*

In his present image, the image of power, ≠*Gao/na*, the creator and controller of all things, is very different from the old protagonist. Bushman informants insisted on their belief, nevertheless, that ≠*Gao/na* of the tales and ≠*Gao/na*, the great god of the eastern sky, are one and the same. For them, through the name, one being has merged into the other and a continuity has been maintained.

The /Kung did not bring up the question of how his nature became so changed. I surmise that it may have been when the name *Huwe* found its way from the Berg-dama to the /Kung, and the name *Hishe* from the Auen, that certain elements of the present image came in, changing the earthly old ≠*Gao/na* into a lofty sky god. But I know nothing about the names */Gara*, *Gami ga*, and ≠*Gaishi* ≠*gai* and nothing about the time or order in which the names may have been created by the /Kung, or adopted, or with which characteristic one or the other may be associated. I *am* sure that current emotional needs and the imaginations of the people who are now living have continued to be at work upon the image, interpreting it, re-creating it, and bringing it to its present form.

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776 The concept of ≠*Gao/na* as a powerful creator and a good being is based in the past. Schapera gives the following accounts: 'Vedder, who studied the Kung at Tsumeb, . . . speaks of *Hnwe* as a good being to whom the people attribute the creation and maintenance of all things.'[1] 'Lebzelter . . . says that all the groups [of Kung] investigated by him have "the belief in a supreme good being".'[2] The Western /Kung of the Oschimpoloveld believe he 'lives in a house in the sky to which the souls of the dead are brought. He is often prayed to, especially for rain and hunting, as well as in case of illness because he made all things and can do everything and knows everything, and he is given the first offering of the chase. The rain comes at his command as a mist out of the earth, and then falls down, thereupon making thunder and lightning.'[3]

Schapera also notes that Lebzelter reports that *Xu* of the Heikum is regarded almost everywhere among them 'as the creator of all things, including mankind, and he sends the rain. He is prayed to for rain, in sickness, before and after hunting, and before travel, and by the group at Uukualuthi he is also given the first-offerings of the chase, as among the Kung of the Oschimpoloveld. Almost everywhere he has neither wife nor children; it is only among the Eastern Kung that mention is made of these. He is regarded everywhere as benevolent and good, but appears to have no connection with the moral life of the people.'[4]

[761 811] This god of the /Kung and the Heikum in the past was not the death-giver. The old //*Gauwa*, as I shall presently describe, held that role. But now, in believing that the great god of the east is all-powerful, the /Kung have logically attributed to him the control over death, and hold him ultimately responsible for it. But their concept of ≠*Gao/na*, first and foremost, is that of the creator.

776 773 [154] It is said that ≠*Gao/na* created himself. One informant, /Tik/ay, claimed that he came out of the water, but others said they were not told this by the old people. I could discover no formulated myth of creation which everybody knew or anything which told how he created himself. People simply said they did not know. /U turned on me and asked me if I knew. When I said I did not, she snapped, How, then, did I expect her to know? After creating himself, ≠*Gao/na* created the lesser god and then their two wives. It was stated quite specifically that there were only two wives and that the gods never took human wives. This is in contrast to the old ≠*Gao/na* of the tales, who gives the impression that he had a bevy of wives.

The great god created the earth and gave it its name, ≠*kxa*. In the earth he created holes for water and he created water. They were not told just how he created these things, the people said. He has an iron of his own with which he works, a */ka* (*/ka* is metal). Some metal tool is what he had, a special one. They 'did not see it', they said, and do not know just what kind of a tool it is or what substances he may have worked with, but they know that he is the creator and the commander of metal.

After the earth, ≠*Gao/na* made the sky in a dome over the earth, and he made rain, */ga*. He made gentle female rain, */gadi*, and violent male rain, */ga/go*. The people do not say freely the word */ga/go* because they fear the violent rains. They use a respect word, */noi*, when they speak to the rain and plead with it to be gentle. ≠*Gao/na* made thunder and lightning.

After the rain, he made the sun. Sun is a 'death thing' which dries up the veldkos

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 183. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 184. [4] Ibid., pp. 184–5.

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and the water-holes. He made the moon and the stars, all at the same time. Then he made the wind. He is the creator of all these things and he commands their movements.

He created the things that grow from the ground and he created animals and painted their stripes and markings on them and gave them their names. Then he created human beings. He created animals as animals and human beings as human beings. He commanded them to breathe. Without breath they would not live. ' First was woman and then man. The man asked the woman to give him fire. She did. The woman got some veldkos and was eating it. Then the man married the woman. This was one man's cryptic account of the creation. Something about the creation of fire seems to have been left out. ≠*Gao/na* named the first woman Khwova for his wife and he named the first man ≠Gao for himself.

From the beginning he created men and women to be mortal. He turns the spirits of the dead into *//ganwasi* and commands them to live in the sky with him and be his servants. He orders them to go down to earth, to mortals, to carry sickness or death to them, or he may order them to carry good fortune.

≠*Gao/na* has a medicine with which he can renew himself at any time. He also renews all the beings who live in the sky with him. They get old and he renews them. They do not die. But he has not given human beings that medicine and the /Kung said, ' We cannot make it.' (They pointed out that in this quality the medicine is like water. They cannot create water. ' We know how to dig and make the holes but we cannot create the water,' they said.)

≠*Gao/na* gave arrows and bows and assegais to human beings and he gave digging-sticks. He gave people the knowledge to make all the things which they now make and taught them to do all they know how to do. ' If he did not want us to know he would not have taught us.' He commanded human beings to dig for food with their sticks and to hunt with their weapons. From the beginning they did these things.

≠*Gao/na* created all the medicines. (The /Kung word for both material substances used as medicines and magic or spiritual medicine is *n/um*.) He created the medicine which is in the medicine songs to cure the people and he created all the other medicines. He put medicine power in the medicine men (*n/um kxau* is medicine man, owner of medicine), and he calls that power *gauxa*, the same respect word which people may use for him when they fear to say his name.

≠*Gao/na* commanded men and women to marry and live together and have children. He controls the actions of people. If they do good deeds or bad deeds it has been under his control. He arranges all things.

Several times in our talks I asked if the great creator controlled the lives of Bushmen only, or if he controlled all the people on earth. It was not surprising that the /Kung's thinking on this point was vague and contradictory. Some said, ' He is over all people. He can kill anybody.' (They had said this same thing about *Ko*.) Others claimed that ≠*Gao/na* and *//Gauwa* as well were ' only for Bushmen '. White people and black people, they said, have their own gods.

≠Gao/na's *Appearance and Dwelling Place*

The /Gikwe Bushmen in the Bechuanaland Protectorate visualize the protagonist of their old tales, *Pisiboro*, as being of supernatural size. In the tortures of his death

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776 throes, his thrashing and writhing limbs gouged out the omurambas,[1] the putrefaction of his body became the rivers, and his black hair became the rain clouds. But the /Kung, it seems, always thought of their protagonist as man-like in size and appearance. The old ≠*Gao/na* was man-like. ≠*Gao/na*, the great god of the east, is also man-like. He has the power to change himself into the forms of animals or objects and sometimes does so, but in his own form he is a man. The people say he is 'the tallest of the Bushmen'. His bearing, as the people at present imagine him, suggests [115] to me the Tswana or white men, or the tall aggressive Herero. Gao Medicine, Gao Beard, Old Demi, ≠Toma, /Qui, and /Ti/kay told us from time to time how they imagine ≠*Gao/na* to be. He has a big head. He has black hair, but it is long, not twisted and knotted like the Bushman peppercorn, and he has a long beard and hair on his chest (not at all like Bushmen, whose beards and body hair are sparse). Gao Medicine thinks that ≠*Gao/na*'s skin is reddish in colour, */ga*, like Europeans, but others claimed that it is the colour of Bushman skin in its light tones, *gan*. ≠*Gao/na* wears European clothes and a hat. His pants and shirt are white. 'He is the great god and has power over all these things, so he possesses them.' He has a horse and rides everywhere across the earth and sky. You can sometimes hear the sound of his horse's hooves passing overhead. Especially when it rains he goes about a great deal and you can see the tracks of his horse. They are like those of the Hereros' horses, not exceptional in size or form. He has a gun and when he starts out, for instance to visit his */guma* in the west, he shoots it off to let the people know he is passing through, and shoots again when he returns. The shots can be heard by everybody. The bullet which he shoots is named */guri*.

≠*Gao/na* hunts for his own food with his gun or with his bow and arrows, as he pleases. Some informants think that he hunts animals on earth and that he eats earthly veldkos, but has his own supplies of these foods. Others were vague about what kind of food he eats. They know that he and the lesser god and the *//gauwasi* are all very fond of earthly honey and take it whenever they find it. The people all believe that the gods never lack food.

If ≠*Gao/na* hears his name spoken in the daytime and is displeased, he comes down on his horse at sunset and beats stiff dry hides with a stick or snaps an eland-hide reim[2] to make a noise like thunder to frighten all the people.

The majority of our informants held the above beliefs about ≠*Gao/na*, telling us these details from time to time as we sat in groups. Some informants, however, held a different opinion. Several who were working with Robert Dyson in 1951 claimed that ≠*Gao/na* never came to earth. Their old people had told them this, they said. All concurred in the belief that he does not come to the medicine dances.

≠*Gao/na* lives in a house at the place where the sun rises in the eastern sky. Near the house is a great tree—one tree. The /Kung fear the tree and the house, they say. The lesser god in the west lives beside two trees, and these two trees have names. I was repeatedly told that the one tree of the great god in the east had no name. Perhaps, however, it has and the name is one which is really taboo. The tree is associated with the spirits of the dead, as I shall mention later. ≠*Gao/na*'s house has two stories. It is long, made of stone, with a shining roof of corrugated iron. There

[1] Ancient watercourses, now usually dry.
[2] A pliable strip or thong used for twisting into ropes.

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are big doors on the ends and small doors on the sides. Our informants believe that all the *//ganwasi* (spirits of the dead) live on the lower floor, and that ≠*Gao!na* and his wife and children live on the upper floor. Although the house differs so much from a Bushman scherm, the /Kung use the same word for it, *choo*. No mortal has seen ≠*Gao!na*'s dwelling place, not even the greatest of medicine men. The old people were told about it, but how they were told is not known. When ≠*Gao!na* appears to the great medicine men he meets them somewhere else.

The image of the house accords with beliefs held by North-Western Bushmen as Schapera reports: 'But among certain of the North-Western Bushmen *Huwe* also dwells in a house in the sky where he receives the souls of the dead. This belief is apparently not found at all among the Hottentots, nor has it been recorded of the other Bushman tribes. It is also held, however, in what appears to be a far more elaborate form, by the Bergdama.'[1]

The image accords in several respects also with that of the Eastern Kung, whom Lebzelter describes, except that in the belief of the Eastern Kung the spirits of the dead live on the upper floor and ≠*Gao!na* on the lower.[2] The stone walls and the corrugated iron roof are the new elements, added as the Nyae Nyae /Kung visualize him in his present power, possessing and commanding all things.

Only exceptionally great medicine men see ≠*Gao!na*. If I understood correctly, this is not because he is generally invisible but because he comes near only to them. ≠*Gao!na* is 'wild', as an animal is 'wild', meaning 'keeping his distance'. He has so much power in him that he is dangerous. If he came into a werf his power might destroy it. Some of the medicine men said that ≠*Gao!na* would not come nearer than about a hundred yards, pointing to a tree to illustrate the distance. /Ti/kay, who claimed that he himself had never seen ≠*Gao!na*, said that even a big medicine man is apt to be frightened when he sees ≠*Gao!na* for the first time and might say, 'What does this man want? He is bad. I don't like him.' /Ti/kay continued, saying that even a *very* big medicine man, long in medicine, having seen ≠*Gao!na* many times, would still be frightened, but when sickness came and he was curing and was full of power, he would keep a 'tight heart' and take a stick and would rush at ≠*Gao!na* and hit him and yell, 'You sent a bad sickness. You must take it back.' And the sick person would get better. This is how all the medicine men habitually treat the lesser god and the spirits of the dead, whom they meet regularly at the medicine dances, but, as ≠*Gao!na* does not come to the medicine dances, the great medicine man would encounter him only under special circumstances and would indeed need all his courage.

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 397.

[2] 'This "supreme being" [*Huwe* or *Xu*] is regarded as anthropomorphic, he looks like a Bushman and he also speaks Kung. He lives in the sky in a house with two storeys, the lower of which is occupied by himself, his wife, whose name is unknown, and many children, while the upper is occupied, as already mentioned, by the souls of the dead (*xu*). In appearance this house is similar to the ordinary Bushman hut, although not quite the same, and its exterior is "hairy like a caterpillar." Honey, locusts, fat flies, and butterflies are found here in superabundance, and the "great captain" feeds upon these; the souls of the dead, however, merely sit around and eat nothing. *Xu* summons the magicians to their profession, and gives them supernatural powers; he is the lord over rain and lightning, as well as over the spirits, *//ganub*, and through the chief of the latter he sends good fortune in hunting or in the collection of veldkos. If anybody thinks or speaks evil of him, he punishes the evildoer with lightning; otherwise he takes no interest in the doings of his "Bushman children", except when somebody swears falsely by him, for the Kung have a regular oath in which they invoke him. He is prayed to by them in fixed form for rain, in case of severe illness, before going out hunting or before undertaking a dangerous journey' (Ibid., p. 284).

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It was characteristic of the /Kung that none of the medicine men whom we knew claimed to have seen ≠*Gao!na*. They were not great enough, they said. The /Kung do not wish to risk drawing upon themselves the invidious attention of mortals or the whimsical displeasure of the gods by setting themselves up noticeably before others. Some said that they had been told by their parents of only one great medicine man among their neighbouring bands who had seen ≠*Gao!na*. His name was Gao. He died long ago.

Although ≠*Gao!na* comes only to the great medicine men 'in the flesh', so to speak, he appears to anyone in dreams and 'helps all his people'. A hunter said that ≠*Gao!na* stands beside one in one's dream and says, 'You have been walking and walking and you got nothing. Today I shall give you meat.' The hunter gets up and goes out on to the veld. He sees an animal and shoots it. ≠*Gao!na* may say, on the other hand, 'These days you will not find an animal even if you hunt'; and it will be the truth. He may tell you in a dream where to find honey in a tree or where to find an ant hill. He gives power to the medicine men in dreams and also medicine songs. A medicine woman described vividly how he had taught her a medicine song which she then gave to her people. He stood beside her instructing her to sing the song over and over until she had learned it.

//GAUWA, THE LESSER GOD

Among the Nyae Nyae /Kung the word *//Gauwa* has three interpretations. First, a *//gauwa* is the spirit of a dead person; the spirits of the dead in the plural are *//gauwasi*. Second, the Nyae Nyae /Kung, as we have said, call the children born to the gods 'little *//gauwasi*'. Third, they apply the name *//Gauwa* to both the great and the lesser god. It is one of the seven names they have in common. In the current beliefs of the Nyae Nyae /Kung there is not a being called *//Gauwa* who is a separate entity apart from the great and the lesser god.

Among other Bushmen and the Hottentots, *//Gauwa* was a being distinct from the other being who is variously named *Hishe*, *Huwe*, *Xu*, &c. As I interpret the present belief of the /Kung, the lesser god is that old, traditional *//Gauwa*. He has been transmuted, however, from the old image to a new one, as the old protagonist, ≠*Gao!na*, was transmuted into the great god. *//Gauwa*'s name has been attributed to the great god as the great god's names have been attributed to him. The two beings remain separate entities in the */gu!na–/guma* relationship.

I base the interpretation that the lesser god is the traditional *//Gauwa* on the facts that many of his attributes are the same as or similar to those of the traditional being and that I did not hear people use any other name for him but *//Gauwa* and did not once hear the name *//Gauwa* used for the great god when people spoke spontaneously of him, although they insisted that it was one of the seven names which the gods have in common.

Excerpts from Schapera indicate that *//Gauwa* was generally the destroyer. Vedder reports that the /Kung at Tsumeb expect only evil from him and think of him as opposed to *Huwe*. But Lebzelter's Eastern Kung believed that he was good as well as evil, that he helped hunters, and some thought he was the creator. 'He is everywhere and moves between heaven and earth on cords.'[1] By the Heikum also he was

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 188.

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thought to be the creator. ' The souls of the dead come to live with him, and he eats their hearts.'[1] Hottentots considered him to be wholly the destroyer, the black chief, opposed to *Tsui ǁGoab*, the creator and rain-giver. ' . . . it is further said, by the Naman, that " *Tsui ǁGoab* lives in a beautiful heaven, and *ǁGamab* lives in a dark heaven quite separated from the heaven of *Tsui ǁGoab* ", while the Korana told Wuras that *Tsui ǁGoab* lived in the Red Sky and *ǁGamab* in the Black Sky.'[2]

ǁGauwa in past concepts was more independent than now but otherwise he preserves the same mingling of characteristics. He does both good and evil deeds, from man's point of view, with emphasis upon death-giving and evil-doing. He has now become subservient to the great god, *≠Gao!na*, a servant who carries out orders and does his master's work. He should always obey *≠Gao!na*, but he preserves considerable independence, nevertheless, and instigates his own affairs.

One of his works is to go about to see what is going on. ' He tells the old man in the east whatever he sees and hears. " These people are staying well, those are not so well ",' Gao Medicine said, and continued, ' He may say to the old man, " Let us help these people get some food." Or he may tell him that lightning is killing some people and ask, " What shall I do? " '

Gao Scarf told us, in effect, that one time *ǁGauwa* went to *≠Gao!na* and asked him for medicine. *≠Gao!na* was annoyed. He said, ' The medicine must stay with me. I am bigger than you.' *ǁGauwa* went away and did not ask any more until some time had passed. Then he went and asked again. *≠Gao!na* said, ' You bad, stupid fellow! You think you are clever but you are not. I am bigger than you. I have everything. You must come and ask me every time, but this time take the medicine and go and work with your Bushmen.' That is how *ǁGauwa*, as well as *≠Gao!na*, gives medicine to the medicine men.

ǁGauwa is a ' small man ', he has small sense, and he makes many mistakes. If someone is sick, when the medicine men at the curing dances see him lurking, they rush at him, give him a blow, and shout that he has brought the wrong medicine. ' Idiot! You have done wrong. You make me ashamed. Go away.' And *ǁGauwa* then runs away. Sometimes after his chastisement he comes back with the proper medicine to cure and the sick person recovers.

The /Kung associate *ǁGauwa* with whirlwinds as the other Bushman and Hottentot groups did. The /Kung call a whirlwind *ǁgauwa ≠a*, which means *ǁGauwa* smell. *≠A* is not an ordinary odour, which one can actually smell, and a whirlwind is not an ordinary wind, which is *mao*. The /Kung believe that a whirlwind is ' a death thing ', ' a fight '. *ǁGauwa* walks in the whirlwind and his smell is in it, and death is in it. If the wind passes over a person, the *≠a* goes into him, and he will get sick and die. The spirits of the dead, the *ǁgauwasi*, also come in the whirlwinds. One cannot see or hear *ǁGauwa* or the *ǁgauwasi* in the whirlwinds. There are no precautions one can take to protect oneself against them except to try to get away. Little ' dust devils ' played around us very frequently in the Kalahari, and often awesome black funnels of ashes formed in the veld fires and reached from the earth to the heavens. Sometimes white clouds condensed on their tops and we believe that we saw 'pillars of cloud by day' like those the children of Israel saw.

[1] Ibid., pp. 188–9. [2] Ibid., p. 389.

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776 ‖GAUWA's *Dwelling and Appearance*

‖Gauwa lives in the western sky at the place where the sun sets. (Cf. *‖Gaunab* of the Hottentots living in a black sky and *Tsui ‖Goab* in a red sky, p. 239.) /Ti/kay said more than once that the lesser god lived in the east. That was what he remembered being told by the old people, he claimed. The other informants agreed, however, in many different interviews, that it was the other way, that the lesser god lived in the west, so I take that to be their current belief.

Some believe that *‖Gauwa* first lived in a hole, */gu*. He made the hole, one informant told us, by pushing the earth out with his head. The hole was like a spring-hare hole, but very big. There were two entrances; one faced toward the sunrise, one faced toward the sunset. *‖Gauwa* later made a house (*cho*). The house is tied together with wire and has poles made of iron. The house stands in a flat open space. It is built up off the ground, upon the iron poles which are stuck into the ground and rise up into the air. Informants said that 'when a person is sick with sore throat, the sickness [753 has been caused by those irons which stick into the air. If *‖Gauwa* does not like a 756] person he can hurt him with those irons. The "old man" (*≠Gao/na*) tells him the way he must hurt a person.' When the medicine men are in trance they go to that house. This is how they know what it is like. They go up by a cord which hangs down from the sky. (Cf. Lebzelter's account of the Eastern Kung who believe that *‖Gaunab* moves between heaven and earth on cords.)[1]

There are two trees near *‖Gauwa*'s house. They have names. Nothing else on the earth or in the sky bears those names, one informant told us. The name of the tree which is towards the north with respect to the other is */Gaio*; the one towards the south is named */Dua*. The names mean nothing; they are 'just names'. */Gaio* and */Dua* have smooth bark and large white flowers, no thorns, no nuts. I thought they might be like baobabs which have these characteristics, but they are not. They are more nearly like the camelthorn (which incidentally has two names, */gi* 'a respect name' and */ana* 'a rough name') but are not exactly like any tree on earth.

776 The medicine men see *‖Gauwa*. Only a very big medicine man, full of the power 756 which *≠Gao/na* had put into him, might see *≠Gao/na* himself, as we learned, but any of the medicine men can see *‖Gauwa*. /Ti/kay thought that because *‖Gauwa* was so [787 often sent by *≠Gao/na* as his messenger the medicine men all become familiar with him. Anyone may see *‖Gauwa* in dreams.

The image of *‖Gauwa* varies. The present image accords with tradition in some aspects. Whereas *≠Gao/na* is 'the tallest of the Bushmen', *‖Gauwa* is short. He has the form of a man, and the colour yellow is associated with him (similar characteristics to those of Lebzelter's little yellow mannikins with thick bellies, the *dau*).[2] But individuals have their own interpretations. I am convinced that some of the [158 medicine men, Gao Medicine for one, really believe that they do see *‖Gauwa*. They see in the shadows among the trees and bushes objects which they interpret to be *‖Gauwa*, or they see the light of the veld fires between the branches, or some such phenomenon, or they have visions or hallucinations, perhaps while in trance. Some perhaps just imagine a form.

Demi, a medicine man in Band 12, saw *‖Gauwa* the night of the great dance at

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 188. [2] Ibid.

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Gam when four bands danced together. Demi was the smallest Bushman we had seen in the region. He was bedecked with many beads and walked with a prance like a bantam cock. He had seen *//Gauwa* in the darkness, he told us. He had confronted him and driven him off with imprecations and sticks. I asked him to tell me what *//Gauwa* looked like. *//Gauwa* is as big as a mouse and has legs like a mouse, he promptly told me, showing me a pipe about four inches long to demonstrate *//Gauwa*'s size. (Demi did not say *//Gauwa* was a mouse; he said ' as big as '.) *//Gauwa* is covered all over with short yellow hairs. This bright, prancing little man had seen a little god. None of the other medicine men saw *//Gauwa* as small as that.

Gao Scarf sees *//Gauwa* regularly. He is like a man in form, but not such as we. He is about two and a half feet tall. (Gao demonstrated with a stick.) He has yellow hair over his whole body. He does not speak as we speak. He says, ' *hu hu hu* ', like the medicine men when they are performing a ceremony, but softly. Only medicine men hear him and understand him.

Another Gao said that *//Gauwa* is about a foot tall and the colour of a wart hog. He has the form of a man.

When Gao Medicine is in trance, he often sees *//Gauwa*. He is a being about the height of a guinea-fowl, grey in colour like the bark of the ubiquitous camelthorn tree. But to Gao, *//Gauwa* is not clearly visible; he is like a mist.

/Ti/kay claimed to me that he was ' young in medicine ' and had never seen *//Gauwa*, as he had claimed that he had never seen *≠Gao/na*. This was an engaging torsion of the truth. I myself had many times seen /Ti/kay appear to confront *//Gauwa* during his curing. /Ti/kay was to me the most spectacular of all the medicine men in performing the ceremony. He did not fear to scream into the shadows, ' *Nonabe!* You have brought a bad medicine. It is going to kill someone. Take it back.' The people, I am sure, did not believe that he was ' young in medicine ' and that he did not see *//Gauwa* when the other medicine men did. /Ti/kay, as I think is apparent even in these brief accounts of him, was something of a deviant. I believe that he contradicted other informants because his nature habitually drove him to oppose others and that, at the same time, he deliberately and rationally tried to deceive me and lead me astray, first for one reason, then another. He was jealous of our harmonious relations with *≠*Toma and Gao Medicine. We were pleased and grateful to them when they would work with us and he refused, and this made him spiteful. Also, due to some influence which we do not know about, he may actually believe some of the things he told us, such as that *//Gauwa* lives in the east instead of the west. We were never certain about him.

The *//Gauwasi*

The Nyae Nyae /Kung believe strongly and vividly in the existence of spirits of the dead, the *//gauwasi*, who live immortal lives in the sky with *≠Gao/na*, doing his bidding. The *//gauwasi* come to earth and enter into the affairs of men when *≠Gao/na* so commands them. The /Kung fear them, pray to them to invoke their mercy or sympathy, exhort them in anger. The concept of having special relations with their own ancestors or of worshipping ancestors is lacking.

The people claim that they fear to speak of the *//gauwasi* lest they call attention to themselves or offend the spirits. They say it is a ' death thing to speak of them much ',

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775 and they have a respectful term, */airisi*, to use if they wish to show deference and be ingratiating. Actually the /Kung seemed to speak of the *//gaowasi* quite often and much less reluctantly than they spoke of the gods. I did not happen to hear them use */airisi* except when they were telling me the term.

775 772 The *//gaowasi* move about in the sky or on earth. All over the sky fine cords are stretched, like the strands of a spider's web, invisible to us but strong. The *//gaowasi* move on these cords and can go anywhere. They descend to earth on one which hangs down from the sky, the one by which the medicine men climb up when they go to see *//Gaowa* in the western sky.

775 772 321 The idea that the stars are the eyes of the dead, which some Bushmen believe, is not held by the Nyae Nyae /Kung. Some informants had heard that other people believed this. Lazy /Qui said he did not know; certainly enough people had died to account for there being so many stars. Others said stars are just stars there in the sky. Although they have names for several of them and stories about some, they do not know what substances stars are made of or what their nature is.

775 [761 825] The /Kung associate falling stars with death. They do not believe that they are spirits of the dead but that they fall to earth and become insects which are colloquially called 'ant lions' (*Myrmeleonidae*, in the order of Neuroptera). These insects are common in the region. In the larval state they live in holes in the ground where one can see them spurting out grains of earth or sand. They devour ants. The /Kung believe that the bite of a fallen star may cause you to die the next day but that, if the star likes you and wishes to spare you, its bite will do you no harm. The old people have said so. *≠Gao/na* has no particular association with ant lions other than being the creator and controller of all things.

The spirits of dead persons are transmuted into *//gaowasi* by *≠Gao/na* in the east. When a person dies, *//gaowasi* come soon to take his spirit. The children of the gods are sometimes the ones who come, we were told, but any of the *//gaowasi* may do so, either ancestors of the dead person or non-related spirits.

[774] The *//gaowasi* pull the spirit out through the head of the corpse. The head is, likewise, the egress of the spirits of the medicine men. When the medicine men are in trance, [787] which the /Kung call half-death, their spirits go out temporarily from their bodies through their heads to encounter and combat *//Gaowa* and the *//gaowasi*, who lurk in the shadows around the dance fire, and it is through the heads that the spirits return.

[775] The spirit which the *//gaowasi* take from the corpse is distinct from life. The /Kung believe that life, *≠toa*, is inside the body of a person or animal, that it is put there and held there by the creator. It exists in all the vital organs in the abdomen, in blood, in the heart, lungs, throat, and mouth, and is everywhere in the head. It does not exist in the arms and legs, the /Kung believe, because they know that human beings and animals can be wounded in a limb or even lose one and not die, whereas a wound in the vital parts is likely to kill. Life dies in the body and stays there—dead, as the [774] body itself is there but dead. It is the spirit which does not die. The only word I know for spirit is *//gaowa*. The spirit is like air. It cannot be seen and cannot be kept by mortals. The *//gaowasi* take it and they take the heart and blood of the person as well. These the *//gaowasi* carry first into the western sky, to the place where *//Gaowa* lives, but they do not leave them with him. They carry them further, around by the south to the east, to the place where *≠Gao/na*, the great creator, lives.

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The great creator receives the spirit, heart, and blood of the dead person and turns these elements into a *//ganwa*. To do this he makes a fire under the tree which grows in his werf, the tree for which we know no name. He puts a pot on the fire, and in this he boils medicines. Only he has these particular medicines. Men do not know their names. *≠Gao/na* then hangs the spirit, heart, and blood of the dead person in the tree. The tree itself is medicine. That is why the people fear it and why *≠Gao/na* hangs the spirits in it. The medicine smoke rises and blows around the dead person's spirit, heart, and blood, and they are transmuted into a *//ganwa*. *≠Gao/na* then smears the *//ganwa* with fat. This fat is not from an animal; it belongs only to *≠Gao/na* and is called */thoo*. *≠Gao/na* then takes the *//ganwa* to live with him in his house. 775 776

The *//ganwasi* have bodies which resemble those they had on earth except for their hair. We were told that their hair is changed from the Bushman's spirals to *≠Gao/na*'s hair, which is long, like a European's, but as black as a Bushman's. Only medicine men who have full medicine see the *//ganwasi*. 775 [756]

The *//ganwasi* eat food. As I understand it, they, like *≠Gao/na* and *//Ganwa*, eat the same foods that mortals eat, meat and veldkos, but they have their own supplies. They also are very fond of honey. They are said on occasion also to steal the veldkos of human beings from the places where they grow, and they sometimes change themselves into birds—not vultures, but smaller birds called */gwara*—and in this form come into the werf and eat the people's meat right where it hangs in the branches beside the scherms. The *//ganwasi* have their own implements, weapons, karosses, &c. They want nothing from men and there is no point in offering them things. [825] [782]

≠Gao/na gives the *//ganwasi* everlasting life. They grow older but, before they are very old, he rejuvenates them. He has a medicine for this which he does not give to men. Children who die remain children.

//Ganwasi keep their own spouses if they wish, and they live together but do not beget children. No great point was made of this. It was interesting to learn that, if a *//ganwa* tires of his wife and wants another, he may kill a living woman who attracts him, so, if a beautiful woman dies, one who is fresh and clean and wears fine ornaments, one could suspect that some *//ganwa* has taken her for himself. And a strong young hunter might be killed by a female *//ganwa* who wanted him. In spite of the power and dominance of the gods, the *//ganwasi* take things into their own hands sometimes. [761]

No distinction is made between a good and a bad person when he dies. All go to the great god in the east and all become *//ganwasi* without differentiation in status or function. With the exception of suicide, no distinction is made either between a good and a bad death, such as is reported by Fourie of the Auen, according to Schapera: 'People who die a "good death" are said to go to */khuiti*, those dying a "bad death" to *Gaua*. The former have a good time and live in plenty; the latter, on the other hand, often suffer hunger and distress.'[1] Among the Nyae Nyae /Kung suicides are said to stay with *//Ganwa* in the west. Burial also has no effect upon the status in the after-life—whether a person is buried properly bound in a deep round grave, or scratched into a shallow trench, or not buried at all and eaten by beasts. [762]

The beliefs which we associate with ghosts—the haunting of graves or certain other places, appearing as spectres to persons, &c.—are not highly developed among the /Kung but are not entirely lacking. Three stories of *//ganwasi* haunting graves came

[1] Schapera, op. cit., p. 160.

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775 to our ears. One story was that at a place between Gam and Gautscha, where a person died, something goes ' *wuu wuu wuu* ', making a sound like wind in an empty ostrich eggshell or a bee buzzing in a bottle. The thing once chased ≠Nisa and her daughter.
[761] They were terribly frightened, and people warned each other not to go near that place again ' because a person could get such a fright he could die of it '. One cannot see the thing. One can only hear it. On being questioned, people said they thought the thing was a *//gauwa*.

[787] *//Ganwasi* are mischievous as well as conveyors of grave evils and they trick and fool people on their own initiative, often appearing to people in dreams to do so. One might dream, for instance, that the *//ganwasi* told him he would shoot a fat buck if he hunted in a certain direction. If he then hunted there and failed to kill anything, he would know that they had tricked him. ≠Toma felt, when he was sick, that he was lying on thorns and that the *//ganwasi* were pressing down on him.

The function of the *//ganwasi* is, first and foremost, to be the servants (*≠gasi*) of the gods and to carry out their orders. They obey *≠Gaolna* primarily, but are servants of *//Gauwa* as well. They are the messengers, whether good or bad fortune is being sent to the people.

775 When the gods order them to kill a person, the *//ganwasi* have innumerable ways of
761 doing so. They can allow a buffalo to gore the person, a lion to maul him, or a snake
753 to bite him. They were responsible for a man's falling to his death from a baobab tree—an appalling death to the /Kung, who are as careful and sure as cats. Lightning
[821] —' rain fire '—is ' a death thing ' and is used by the *//ganwasi* to kill people when the gods so command. *//Ganwasi* have the traditional miniature magic bows and arrows, with which they shoot people. One feels the pain of the little arrow piercing, when one is shot, but one cannot see the arrow; eventually one dies of it. Sickness, however, is the greatest tool of the death-bringers and they kill mostly by it. They can bring their sicknesses, death, and other misfortune to men at any time, but they are sure to come to the ceremonial curing dances and are always there in the shadows watching for their chance to inflict the ill on the person or persons whom they are sent to destroy.

Although the *//ganwasi* are associated in the people's minds primarily with sickness and death and the people fear them with a pervading fear, the /Kung do not appear to suffer in an agony of terror. I think that their fear is mitigated by the belief that the *//ganwasi* are minor characters and can be driven away and that in their own natures they are not wholly evil. Like the mortals they once were, they are capable of being
[782] good, bad, or indifferent to man. People can plead with them for their favour and sometimes they feel pity and are helpful.

Man's Relations with the Gods

772 ≠*Gaolna* said, when he praised himself, ' I take my own way and no one can com-
776 mand me. I am a stranger, unknowable. I am *chi dole*.' The /Kung these days evidently imagine him to be as much the self unbridled as the old protagonist of the tales. However, unlike the old ≠*Gaolna*, he is not indifferent to mankind, and, even though he lives in the sky, he is not remote. On the contrary, he is deeply involved with humanity, constantly aware of what people do, constantly reacting with pleasure or displeasure, and he favours, punishes, or ill-treats man accordingly.

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Good and evil are thus explained by a duality which has its principal source in the omnipotent ≠*Gao/na*'s own self-oriented nature. The scope of this duality is enlarged by the similar duality in the natures of *//Gauwa* and the *//gauwasi*, who sometimes do good deeds to man and sometimes bad, when they are doing the work commanded by their master, and, also, when they instigate actions on their own initiative, as they sometimes do, especially I gather when ≠*Gao/na* is not around, for he is omnipotent but not omniscient or omnipresent.

Evil is sometimes accounted for by the gods working at cross purposes among themselves. For instance, *//Gauwa* might lead a man to find honey which ≠*Gao/na* had intended for someone else whom he wished to favour. ≠*Gao/na* would be angry and take revenge upon the man who found the honey. But, on the other hand, the gods may talk things over and agree together and man may benefit. The *//gauwasi* might want to take a person in death. One god would say, 'Go ahead', but the other says, 'No, let us not take him.' The first then agrees and the person is left. That is how people may be very ill and still be cured.

Punishment

The concept of sin as an offence against the gods is vague among the /Kung. Man's wrong-doing against man is not left to ≠*Gao/na*'s punishment nor is it considered to be his concern. Man corrects or avenges such wrong-doings himself in his social context. ≠*Gao/na* punishes people for his own reasons, which are sometimes quite obscure. It was interesting to see in the examples given how often food was involved.

Burning bees, I learned, displeases ≠*Gao/na* intensely. He likes the bees, his wife is the 'mother of the bees', and he is very fond of honey himself. On one occasion, two men found honey in a tree. They tried to chop it out but the bees stung them so badly that they built a fire to drive them away and many bees were burned. ≠*Gao/na* did not like this. He sent a sickness upon the men and both died. When a person has burned bees, his body becomes hot as though burned by fire and he dies.

≠*Gao/na* might change himself into a gemsbok and be walking in the veld. A hunter might come along and kill that gemsbok, thinking how lucky he was to get it. He would take the meat home and eat it and the next day he would be dead. Others who had no part in the killing would not die. ≠Toma who was telling this went on to say that ≠*Gao/na* might regret having done such a thing—killing a man who was just hunting to feed his children instead of helping him—and, to make amends, he might particularly favour that man's son.

If ≠*Gao/na* really sets out to kill someone in punishment, ≠Toma told us, one method he uses is to convert himself into honey and place himself in a tree like an ordinary honeycomb. Then he directs the person he wants to kill to that tree. The person takes the honey home, eats it, and then dies.

≠Toma added that ≠*Gao/na* might punish a person just a little by giving him a mild sickness, which would be comparable to giving him a thrashing. A good person who had done no wrong at all might also be punished by a mild sickness. ≠*Gao/na*'s motive, ≠Toma explained, might be to 'test' him or to 'break' him. (Ledimo and I worked carefully over this translation. We think we have the correct idea.) Why? we asked, but ≠Toma could not say. Not man's due, but whim and pride

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776 in demonstrating his supremacy and power would be a reason in keeping with the nature of one who said, 'I am *chi dole*.'

≠*Gao/na* is fortunately not a god of mighty wrath and vengeance. 'He does not get too angry,' ≠Toma remarked. 'That is why there are still people living on earth.' He and others who were present at our talk went on to point out again ≠*Gao/na*'s benefactions, such as giving children, giving rain, and giving poison. One of his benefactions was poison, they said. He taught Bushmen how to put it on their arrows so that they could kill animals and eat, as the god of the black people gave cattle and the knowledge of growing crops so that his people could live.

Prayer

782 There are no priests among the /Kung and it is not the function of medicine men
756 to pray for the people or to lead them in prayer. Individuals frequently pray, how-
793 ever, spontaneously and alone. Anybody, everybody, may pray directly to ≠*Gao/na*, to *//Gauwa* or to the *//gauwasi*, at any time or place, without assuming special posture or observing any other formalities.

The people say the words of their prayers silently to themselves, or they say them aloud, as though thinking aloud, but speaking directly to the gods. They may also speak to each other to be overheard by the gods. When men go to look for honey, they may pray to *Khwova/na*, the mother of the bees, to give them luck. Demi said, 'We talk to ourselves and she feels pity and leads us to the honey.'

The prayers seem very often to be in the form of questions which imply accusation—'Why do you do thus and so?'—but the people mean to plead mildly, without displaying anger. The blasphemy of the medicine men, usual when they are in trance, does not appear in the prayers. The people often use the respect terms but they also sometimes speak the names. There is no rule about which names shall be used. It is to be noted that they also say 'father' and refer to themselves as his children. They use the second or third person, one as readily as the other.

'*/Nau*, excuse this man and make him well.'

'Sympathize with me, */Nau*, because you are our *Gaoxa*. Feel pity for me.'

'≠*Gao/na*, why have you made me grieve so? You gave me this person, why will you take him back? Favour me. Let this person live. If he dies, where shall I go?'

'*/Gara* has taken that person while we were still loving him. Why has he taken him?'

'You have created me and given me power to walk about and hunt. Why do you guide us so that we do not get animals?'

'≠*Gao/na*, when the women are walking in the veld looking for veldkos, let them find a dead animal. Shoot it for them with your bullet. Favour us.'

'Give rain. Wet the earth. Let there be veldkos. We are starving because we have to stay by the water-hole where there is no more veldkos. He has favoured some people with rain. Will he not favour us?'

'Please, our father, great man, will you send us rain?'

'Father (*wha*), why is it you help other people and do not help me to find food? We are all your sons. Help me too. I am the same as your other sons.'

'*Gwi ga*, give us coolness.'

'Give us your water (rain). Give us a chance to rest. Give us food. We have nothing else if you do not give us food. Let food grow.'

'Why does ≠*Gao/na* send lightning? Why does he destroy our houses with mad rain?

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Why does the lightning not go and die somewhere and leave us alone and just let a gentle rain give us water?' 782

If someone were struck and killed by lightning, Gao Medicine said he would say,

'*Hishe*, why have you taken this person? Why do you strike us with storm? You cannot always be good; you keep changing. You created all things and are present in every movement. Why must you do ill?'

About another storm, Gao Medicine said,

'It is */Nau* who makes these things. He is scolding us because we are his children. It is because of our bad ways we are so punished. We must not complain. This is a good time, the time of rain. We must not complain.'

When the people are pleased they thank ≠*Gao/na* and say, 'This is how you must serve your children.'

The /Kung pray directly to *//Gauwa* as well as to ≠*Gao/na*. One old man named Tuka/na made a prayer into a song and taught it to his people. The men sometimes sing it when they are walking along in the veld on hunting trips. It says in effect: [533]

'*//Gauwa* must help us that we kill an animal.
//Gauwa, help us. We are dying of hunger.
//Gauwa does not give us help.
He is cheating. He is bluffing.
//Gauwa will bring something for us to kill next day
After he himself hunts and has eaten meat,
When he is full and is feeling well.'

The song then changes to the past tense and tells how *//Gauwa* favoured them in the past and gave them luck in the hunt and they ate and afterwards the man said to the women:

'You must sing well.
We are happy now.
Our hearts are shining.
I shall put on my rattles,
And put on my headband,
And put a feather in my hair
To explain to *//Gauwa* how happy we are that he has helped us and that we have eaten.
My heart is awake.
When we do not have meat
My heart is sad from hunger
Like an old man, sick and slow.
When we have meat my heart is lively.

The concerns and anxieties of these people are manifest in their prayers. The pervasive, unremitting anxiety about food becomes vividly apparent. The concept that ≠*Gao/na* has great power and that he is not evil incarnate, but has a dual nature which can feel pity as well as displeasure, makes beneficence a possibility. The /Kung believe that, influenced by the medicine men's scolding or by supplication, he may change his evil intent, and this gives them hope. [154 776]

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The Ceremonial Curing Dance

The ceremonial curing dance is the one religious act which has form and in which the people are united. The purpose of the dance is to cure sickness and to drive away evil. If there is actual sickness among the people or if real misfortune has come upon them, the dance will be held especially to cure these ills. But the people dance often when no one is actually known to be sick, and when no particular misfortune has come, to drive away evil which might be there but which one cannot see, and to feel protected by goodness.

The protecting goodness is the ' medicine ', the magic power called *gaaxa*, which the /Kung believe the great god puts into the bodies of the medicine men and into the medicine songs. The /Kung believe that the great god endowed the power with its own autonomous potency, but nevertheless account for its failing to cure sometimes by saying that the all-powerful god allows it to work or not, according to pleasure or displeasure. *Gaaxa* is the power evoked and activated during the curing dance.

I believe the ceremonial curing dance to be a religious act, but, although very serious, especially in its final curing aspect, it is not piously solemn or constrained and it provides occasion for pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction. The music can be sung at any time, for lullabies or just for singing. Music and dancing are the arts of the /Kung. The good young dancers, especially, feel the delight which is inherent in fine integration of movement and rhythm (one can see this clearly), and the people watch and admire good dancing and take pleasure in it, and in the music.

[517 533]

Furthermore, the dances are a socially unifying factor. All the people of the werf come together and participate, men and women, old and young. The men often dance with their babies on their shoulders in the early part of the dance, and the children dance and play among them, until they fall fast asleep in their mothers' laps.

[852]

Anyone who wants a dance may start it by going around to people and asking them to come and begin. Someone who was sick would ask for a dance, but young people who love to dance often start just for fun. Sometimes their dances do not turn into curing dances, but usually, once the music begins, the adults join in and the dance becomes a real one. The dances last all night oftener than not. There is a special potency in those which are danced at dawn. The /Kung dance, at irregular intervals, on an average of once in ten days, more or less. Almost invariably they dance at least once during the full moon.

[883]

Among the /Kung the women and girls always sit close together in a circle around a dance fire which may be built wherever there is convenient clear space. Their function is to clap and sing. The men dance in a line, one close behind the another, around the circle of women, in either direction, and cut through the circle past the fire. They sing as they dance. Occasionally a woman gets up and dances with them, though it is not her role, as though she could no longer resist the impulse. When a woman joins the line of dancers, the man behind her holds out his arms towards her but does not touch her. She dances with dignity, making tiny stamping steps, hardly moving, eyes cast down. If there is a delicate overtone of eroticism expressed in the dancing of the women, it is most subtle and constrained—in extreme contrast to the overt expression of many of the Bantu dances.

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The dancing of the men in the curing ceremonial dances has its own special style. In other dances, that of the *Choma*, the Men's Dance, the Eland Dance of the First Menstruation Ceremony, and in the numerous singing-dancing or rhythmic games which the /Kung play for fun, one sees enchanting pantomime and imitation of animals. In the ceremonial dances we sometimes thought we saw what might be a vestige of the imitation of animals' horns in the way the arms were held, but in comparison with the visual expressiveness of the games, the purpose is not to express by gesture but to produce sound, to be part of the music.

The men wear rattles made of strings of dried cocoons with little seeds or stones inside, which make a swishing sound. These are the only instruments used in the dance. (The /Kung, incidentally, have no drums.) The men dance with knees bent and bodies carried with little motion, leaning forward. On the strong accented beat, the dancer gives a hop and comes down with both feet. On the second beat he holds his weight on one foot (alternating right and left) and with the other stamps a single step or ripples two or three light stamps into the time of the single step. The steps are very precise. They are minute in size, advancing only two or three inches, but they are strongly stamped, and ten or twenty dancers stamping together produce a loud thud. The women clap loudly and sharply. The majority of them clap the basic pattern of a particular piece, while some strike a beat or beats which are complementary to the basic beat. The clapping and stamping are of such precision that they give the effect of a well-played battery of percussion instruments producing a solid structure of intricate rhythm. Above the percussion sounds, the voices of the men and women weave together in parts, singing the medicine songs.[1] Since singing and dancing are one, producing the music, I speak of medicine songs or medicine dances interchangeably.

The medicine songs or dances of the /Kung are named *Rain*, *Sun*, *Giraffe*, *Eland*, *Honey*, *Buffalo*, and *Mamba*. Some of the /Kung have *Gemsbok* and *Spider* Medicine music as well. The Rain Dance is not danced as a specific rain-making ceremony. The dances named for animals do not produce magic to control these animals in hunting or to prevent snake-bite, for example. The dances are named for these things because the things are vital, life-and-death things and they are strong, as the curing medicine in the music is strong.

After several dances have been danced the medicine men begin to cure. The /Kung do not have sorcerers, witches, or witch doctors, and do not believe that the divine beings enter into the medicine men or speak through them. Almost all the /Kung men are medicine men. They do not all choose to practise, for one reason or another, but there are always several in a band who are active. Medicine men receive no rewards other than their inner satisfactions and emotional release. I know that some of them feel a deep responsibility for the welfare of their people and great anxiety and concern if their curing fails, and a corresponding satisfaction if it prevails. Others of them appear to be less concerned about the people whom they try to cure and more inwardly turned.

When the medicine men are curing, all of them experience varying degrees of self-induced trance, which includes a period of frenzy and a period of semi-

[1] Nicholas England is in the process of tracing the songs and analysing the music, and he has a paper in preparation which will include /Kung beliefs and practices about them.

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535 796 consciousness or deep unconsciousness.[1] They may become stiff or froth at the mouth or lie still as if in coma. Some of them habitually remain in trance only a short time, [756] others for hours. One man used to remain in a semi-trance for most of the day fol- 787 lowing a dance.

[753] A Bushman curing cannot be fully described in words; it must be heard and I give only an outline here. The medicine man begins by dancing and singing with the others whatever medicine song is being sung. He then leaves the line of dancing men and leans, still singing, over the person he is going to cure. He places one hand on the person's chest, one on his or her back, and flutters his hands. The /Kung believe that in this way he draws the sickness, real or potential, out of the person through his own arms into himself. He grunts with shuddering, gurgling, gasping grunts which intensify in tempo and pitch into shrieks and reach a high, piercing, quavering yell. Finally the medicine man throws up his arms to cast the sickness out, hurling it into the darkness back to *//Gauwa* or the *//gauwasi*, with a sharp yelping cry of '*Kai Kai Kai*'. This shows that it is heavy work to draw the sickness out. The effect of the sound on one observer, myself, was striking—gooseflesh and a stopping of the breath which made it seem as though the heart stood still an instant. A medicine man goes to every person present, leaning over each to cure, even the babies, who, amazingly, [852] seldom cry, though he gurgles and gasps right into their ears. If someone is actually sick, he returns to him again and again through the night.

After the curing has been going on for some time, medicine men begin to reach their state of frenzy. They no longer go around to the people, their spasms of grunting and shrieking become more frequent and violent, their stomachs heave, they stagger and sway. They rush to the fire, trample it, pick up the coals, set fire to their hair. Fire activates the medicine in them. People hold them to keep them from falling and beat out the flames. They rush out into the darkness, where *//Gauwa* and the *//gauwasi* are lurking. They hurl burning sticks and swear at them. 'Filthy face! Take away the sickness you have brought.' 'Uncovered penis[2]! You are bad. You want to kill us. Go away.' '*Hishe*, you are a liar. This man will not die.' At this point they may fall into deep unconsciousness or sink down semi-conscious, eyes closed, unable to walk.

The medicine men who have not reached their full frenzy or who have passed through it attend those who are in it. The /Kung believe that at such a time the medicine man's spirit leaves his body and goes out to meet *//Gauwa* and the *//gauwasi*. They call this 'half death'. It is a dangerous time and the man's body must be watched over and kept warm. The medicine men lean over the one who is in trance. They

[276] [1] The /Kung know about the drug called dagga. They told us that it grows in B.P. and that when they go to trade they sometimes get a little. They like to have some when they go hunting; it keeps one from feeling tired or discouraged, they say. They might take some at a dance if they had it, but they are not dependent on it or on any other substance to induce trance. The trances are psychologically induced.

[195 578] [2] /Kung men swear a great deal. The swearing plays always upon the themes of the genital organs, sexual intercourse, incest, and excrement. In depreciation they call each other genital organs or tell each other to go and commit incest with their mothers, sisters, wives' mothers, or sons' wives. We have not recorded their saying 'daughter'. Is that thought so terrible to them that its expression is beyond even these hardened swearers? They use the same themes in their blasphemy against the gods. 'Uncovered' or 'thrown-away penis' may mean 'circumcised'. This is a great insult among the /Kung who do not circumcise but know that the Bantu do. 'Filthy face' means 'covered with excrement'.

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shriek and gurgle. They blow in his ears to open them. They take sweat from their armpits and rub him. Some fall over on to him in trance themselves and are in turn rubbed and cared for by the others. The women must sing and clap ardently while a man is in deep trance. He needs the good medicine of the music to protect him.

The curing dance draws people of a Bushman band together into concerted action as nothing else does. They stamp and clap and sing with such precision that they become like an organic being. In this close configuration—together—they face the gods. They do not plead, as they do in their individual supplications, for the favour of the divine, all-powerful beings, and do not praise them for goodness. Instead, the medicine men, on behalf of the people, releasing themselves from ordinary behaviour by trance and overcoming fear and inaction, throw themselves into combat with the gods and try to force them with hurled sticks and hurled words to take away the evils they might be bringing.

The violence and excitement of the ceremony have the effect, as in a drama, I believe, of releasing the emotions of the people and purging them, in Aristotle's sense. Fear and hostility find outlet and the people have acted together to protect themselves. In this there is solace and hope.

Résumé

LA RELIGION DES BOSCHIMANS /KUNG

Les Boschimans /Kung de la région de Nyae Nyae dans le sud-ouest de l'Afrique croient qu'il existe deux dieux — le grand créateur, qui habite dans l'est du ciel, où le soleil se lève, et le petit dieu qui est subordonné au grand dieu, et qui habite dans l'ouest du ciel où le soleil se couche.

Le grand dieu possède sept noms divins, que les /Kung ont peur de prononcer, et un seul nom humain. Certains de ces noms (d'après Schapera ce sont *Hishe*, *Huwe* et *Kxo*) indiquent que le concept du grand dieu tire son origine des croyances anciennes soutenues par d'autres Boschimans et par les Hottentots. Ces noms sont associés avec un être suprême bien disposé. Divers groupes de Boschimans croyaient dans un esprit malfaisant, un 'avant-coureur de la mort', *‖Gauwa*. D'après la croyance actuelle des /Kung de la région de Nyae Nyae, le grand dieu a fait du petit dieu son homonyme en lui accordant tous ses noms divins (mais non son nom humain), et *‖Gauwa* est un des sept noms divins qui sont attribués aux deux dieux. Le nom humain ≠*Gao/na*, le vieux ≠*Gao*, est celui du protagoniste de plusieurs vieux contes bizarres, un être ayant des pouvoirs surnaturels, mais ressemblant à un homme et soumis à toutes les frustrations humaines. Les /Kung ont amalgamé l'ancien protagoniste et le grand dieu en ce qui concerne le nom, mais ils ont modifié l'image.

Le grand dieu s'est d'abord créé lui-même, et ensuite il a créé le petit dieu. Pour chacun d'eux, il a créé une épouse qui a donné naissance à des enfants. Il a créé la terre et le ciel, la femme et l'homme et il a donné des noms à toutes choses. Il a donné le nom de son épouse, Khwova, à la première femme, et son propre nom ≠*Gao* au premier homme. Le grand dieu et le petit dieu s'intéressent principalement à l'humanité. Ni l'un ni l'autre n'est associé essentiellement avec le bien ou le mal à l'égard de l'homme; tous les deux peuvent apporter de grands biens, tels que la pluie, la nourriture et les enfants, mais aussi la mort, la maladie

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et la famine. Tous les deux expriment leur contentement ou leur mécontentement avec les gens, suivant leurs caprices.

Le grand dieu est omnipotent et a le pouvoir de commander chaque action des hommes, des animaux et des éléments. Le petit dieu est censé lui obéir et exécuter ses ordres.

En dernière analyse, le grand dieu est fondamentalement responsable, mais le petit dieu est capable d'une action indépendante et parfois il favorise une personne avec laquelle le grand dieu est mécontent, et, ainsi, fâche le grand dieu qui peut punir cette personne même de mort. Mais les /Kung disent que le grand dieu n'est jamais trop mécontent, car autrement il ne resterait personne vivant sur la terre. Ils adressent des prières sans formalités aux deux dieux en tant qu'individus, notamment au grand dieu, et sollicitent leur bienveillance.

Les /Kung croient que lorsque les gens meurent ils deviennent des esprits, *Ikamasi*, qui sont emportés au ciel où ils vivent avec le grand dieu. Il leur accorde l'immortalité et ils deviennent ses serviteurs, lesquels transmettent ses faveurs ou l'infortune aux hommes.

La seule manifestation religieuse à laquelle le peuple se livre de concert est la danse cérémoniale de guérison. Le grand dieu a donné une forte médecine curative qui réside dans la musique de la danse et dans les corps des guérisseurs. Au cours de la danse, cette médecine est évoquée non seulement afin de guérir quelqu'un qui est effectivement malade, mais également dans le but de chasser le mal éventuel et de protéger les gens. Les /Kung expliquent le fait que parfois la médecine ne guérit pas en disant que le grand dieu permet à la médecine d'agir ou non, suivant sa volonté.

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[For the text of tales about ≠Gao.'na, the Great God, see category 539.]

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[For the text of the myth of how people received fire from the Great God ǂGao!na, see category 539.]